

## Elements of Suspense

First, let's clear something up:

True suspense **plays tricks on the mind** and does not resort to an all-spectacle blood show (chain-saws, gore, screaming dumb blondes, guns, knives slashing to and fro, etc.)

The mind is the ultimate weapon. To tease and torture it with discomfort and isolation plays more fear on a reader than an immediate end with violence.

Here are some of the **techniques** professional writers like Edgar Allan Poe, Anthony Horowitz, Stephen King, Alfred Hitchcock, and several of the greats use to develop their craft.

As we read the horror or suspense story, in the margins of the story, jot down the # of the technique you see at play.

1. An opening that leaves the reader *uncomfortable*
2. Connects to reader by using 2<sup>nd</sup> person, *direct address*, only in one or two analogies
3. An idea of loss (the character must have a psychological reason to defer to even if what is happening is truly happening)
4. Will not have many characters
5. *Unidentified* pronouns
6. Word bombs (*eerie* or strange words spontaneously placed)
7. A character flaw in the protagonist
8. **Isolation** of protagonist and/or reader
  - o Reminders of *isolation*
  - o *Isolation* within format (single words, single fragments, isolated one line paragraphs)
9. *Repetition* for effect (not because they are trying to fill a page or have nothing better to say than the same dumb thing in a different way over and over again)
10. Use of "*perfect words*" that are *morbid in theme* and are surprisingly used, seemingly out of place, but are actually quite perfect
11. *Strong sensory descriptions* (connects with reader to either to make them feel *uncomfortable* or to draw them into a *false sense of security*)
12. Writer will often *mimic the good reader's mind* (outright asks rhetorical questions the reader was already asking themselves)
13. *Settings* will have *odd contrasts* leaving objects out of place and time (anachronisms used for *discomfort*)
14. Ideas that leave the reader *uncomfortable*
15. *Slight jokes* or uses of *humor* that only come across as *discomforting*
16. Feelings of *entrapment*
17. Contrasts of everyday familiar things as oddly *distorted* or evil
18. A way out, but a drive forward due to *curiosity*
19. *Finality*, a sense of no turning back
20. A sense of *time* passing
21. *Slow motion* sensory detail
22. An *ever-watching eye*
23. A *stained existence*
24. A *false sense of security*
25. Ending leaves reader *uneasy*
26. *Unanswered* questions
27. Will never directly explain ending scenario, all must be inferred, but will be obvious.
28. Use of the *ellipses* ... the pause
29. Use of the *dash* – the surprise!

